

# Commencement Speech

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By Jill Tiefenthaler, President

*Colorado College, May 21, 2012*

Welcome proud parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, and friends of our graduates. Thank you for being here. Welcome dedicated faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, and honorary degree recipients. And welcome and congratulations to the Colorado College Class of 2012!

Graduation is an emotional time. You are happy to be done and proud of your accomplishments but sad to leave your friends and mentors and maybe a bit anxious about what lies ahead. As you look at the faces of your parents and family members, you are grateful for their love and support. While you will forever be the Class of 2012, tomorrow you will begin to scatter to new jobs, summer adventures and new schools across the country and around the globe. You will treasure this day, and the memories of your senior year for the rest of your life. As CC's president, I hope that the pride you feel as you walk across the stage today is rivaled only by the nostalgia with which you remember this place and the relationships you forged.

The Class of 2012 will always hold a very special place in *my* heart because your last year at Colorado College was my first year as its president. I feel very lucky to have this opportunity to bid a fond farewell to you – a class who gave me such a warm welcome.

Of course, commencement is about much more than saying goodbye. Today's ceremony also provides us with the opportunity to reflect on the spirit that defines your class; to celebrate the knowledge that you have acquired and created; and to look forward to the exciting potential that you offer.

During the past year I have met and developed relationships with many of you, and I have found myself in awe of your creativity and vibrancy. We have dined together at your off-campus homes and the President's House and met for lunch at Rastall. We have smiled and greeted one another as we walked across the Quad. I have enjoyed interacting and debating with you at campus events, my office hours, and in my economics class. I have watched you excel in the classroom and on the court, ice, and field.

When I reflect on the enormous contributions you have made to our community, I am optimistic about the future of our institution, country, and global community. Your class, reflective of your generation, shares values that our society needs: a dedication to service; a genuine concern for the environment and for sustainable living; tolerance of different views and lifestyles; and an understanding of the importance of collaboration across and within communities. Our goal at Colorado College is to equip each of you with the knowledge and skills to act on your values and make the world a better place. I have already witnessed your class making a difference.

Your dedication to service has fueled the Colorado College Kitchen, one of the country's oldest student-run community kitchens. Each weekend, 52 weekends a year, you served hot meals to needy individuals and sparked discussion about how to create a more just society. Your commitment to public service led to the establishment of a CC liaison for the Colorado Springs City Council – an opportunity to build bridges between the college and our city.

Your concern for the environment produced and maintained the Student Garden, which provides a sustainable source of food for this campus. Similarly, members of this class combined their passion for sustainability and entrepreneurial spirit to create the “Take Charge” Energy Outreach program, which teaches local school children how to lighten their environmental footprints. Your love of nature and the environment inspired you to experience and study the beautiful Rocky Mountains. And many of you engaged in the State of the Rockies program and helped to bring national attention to the plight of the Colorado River Basin.

You displayed your tolerance and appreciation of the importance of considering different views during campus debates about our endowment investment practices, students' rights and responsibilities, and the inclusiveness of our campus.

Likewise, in your classes, your openness to considering different views provided a necessary starting point for an educational experience in which faculty and students learn from one another and explore new ways of thinking about problems, both ancient and modern. Your ability to walk across difference is impressive and essential to your future success and that of our society.

You are also collaborative! This spirit has produced exciting initiatives that unite the Colorado College community and benefit our campus. Members of your class used knowledge gleaned in an economics course to launch the Ninth Block, an on-campus venue (a bar) that now serves as a needed space for students to gather. You asked for more formal venues for the student voice to be considered in college decision-making. So, together, we created the Presidents Council, a group of 20 students who will regularly advise the President, and crafted a proposal for a Student Trustee, which was enthusiastically accepted by our Board.

Of course, your generation faces many challenges. As the world continues to shrink and become more interconnected, difference threatens to create tension and forestall progress in new and yet-to-be-understood ways. Global economic and social challenges seem closer than ever. Your formative years during the 1990s and early 2000s were relatively prosperous ones, and some worry whether your generation has the resilience and fortitude to navigate our world's new and emerging challenges. Although we have new mediums for communication and collaboration that bring us together, these technologies also threaten to fundamentally redefine our understanding of community by eroding our ability to be fully present.

However, I am very optimistic. I believe that who you are and what you have learned at Colorado College make you well-equipped to face any challenge. I have seen you use technology to create new mediums for debate, reflection and communication, not as means of isolation. Likewise, our faculty have pushed you to learn from one another and to devote yourselves to a single subject at a time, instilling the importance of being present as a means of solving complicated problems. Resilience is required to survive and thrive in a CC classroom.

Your faculty members stood by your side and encouraged you to pick yourself up and continue trying. Your liberal arts education has given you nimble minds and comfort with ambiguity that will help to you thrive in this changing world.

I look forward to seeing how each of you put this education to work in different fields, professions, and graduate programs. You are a talented and diverse bunch, and I am confident that you will make us proud.

As you explore the world, remember the time that you spent here. As you continue to learn and to change, reflect on the times when you stumbled and even failed. Recall how your caring mentors pushed you in the right direction, and stretched your imagination and spirit. Keep in touch with each other and your professors, and always remember that this community and this campus is a place that you can call home.